

A

LETTER
TO THE
ELECTORS OF IRELAND,
ON THE
PROJECTED MEASURE
OF AN
UNION.
WITH SOME
FRIENDLY HINTS
TO THE
BOROUGH PATRONS
OF
IRELAND.

BY A FREEHOLDER.

The dawn is overcast, the morning lowers,
And heavily in clouds brings on the day,
The *important* day, big with the fate of Cato and of Rome.

ADDISON'S CATO.

--DUBLIN:—

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1799.

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TO THE

PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

IF ever there was a measure in the contemplation of Government, which importunately and awfully called for your collected wisdom, energy and virtue, to prevent its adoption, indisputably an Union is that critical and momentous subject for Ireland—which is, in its aspect, an object so terrific and menacing, as should appal the hardiest, and rouse the most languid. Was it a matter of inferior consideration, or trivial regard, I should not, *at present*, engage your minds with any political discussion, but patiently wait the period, till the storms of war were past, and seasons of serenity had soon in their turn succeeded.

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But

— But delay must *now* be attended with the most fatal consequences and direful effects, unless the sense of the country is explicitly declared, previously to the meeting of Parliament, it cannot then properly be attempted. Any popular deliberation, during their sitting, would be considered an invasion of their rights—an open and direct attempt to dictate to the Legislature, and overawe Parliament. Be assured, should you not *promptly* express your sentiments on this awful occasion, and instruct your representatives on this great and important subject, you will not have it hereafter in your power to do so, with *any effect*. While you hesitate, the moment is past, your silence will naturally be construed into assent—your non-exertion into acquiescence. It will fairly be said no petition, no remonstrance, no declaration has appeared against the measure; therefore the popular wish is by no means hostile to either the discussion or adoption of it. See on what a precipice you stand, and how awful the crisis! But, my friends, you will be told the terms will be liberal, the outlines great and extensive, and

* The members of the county of Dublin, have begged to receive the instruction of their constituents on this point.

and execution masterly. Undoubtedly they will be so—how could the scheme hope for success or completion, but through the medium of liberality. It is not by shewing the defects, and having them boldly projecting from the canvas, and striking the eye of every beholder, that they could expect to receive your concurrence. No; its plausibility will be the means of your seduction, and an instrument of your subjugation. It has, however, been said, do not prejudge the question—see its merits and imperfections fairly and fully before you, and do not let decision be the forerunner of debate—the conclusion preceding the beginning. To this objection I answer, that every person who has considered the relative situation of both countries, must know, in the abstract, what benefits, landed, commercial, or constitutional, England has to give, and what equivalent sacrifices Ireland, in return, must make. This enquiry wants no profundity, or deep research, but is striking and obvious to the most superficial reasoner. Could it for a moment be supposed, that England would *gratuitously* and *unolicited* confer on us unrequited obligations. No; the whole tenor of her conduct has

been otherwise—exactly and diametrically opposite.

Suppose, for a moment, an Union of the Legislatures to be carried into effect—and should the terms turn out to be beneficial to Ireland—there is no security whatever for their being kept inviolate.* The faith of nations is little to be depended on—all history shews them to be, in their conduct, uniformly selfish. Should the articles be found prejudicial to Ireland, there is no possible redress; they are immutable and irrevocable, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, and it will be with her national character as with female virtue—

Ruin ensues reproach and *endless* shame,
And one false step *eternally* damns her fame.

But a reason is offered in favour of an Union, that it will tranquillize Ireland—and that repose may be expected from a closer connection with a great and powerful country—I ask did it settle Scotland. Since the incorporation of the two kingdoms there were two rebellions, and a third had nearly

* Vide the instances of the Malt tax, law of High Treason, and Peerage.

nearly *last year* taken place, but for the seasonable and fortunate removal of Muir and Palmer, who did not get sufficient time, to completely and finally organize Scotland; or even so would you, on account of a temporary disorder, (which I trust ours only is) adopt so desperate, violent and corrosive a remedy, which undermining the frame, would cure its ills only by effecting its utter destruction; but see how is it likely to pacify Ireland—is it by drawing out of the country men of the first rank and estimation in the kingdom; who possess cultivated tastes, elegant and classical refinements—in short have the manners to polish, the disposition to civilize, and the heart to ameliorate the condition of the people, and are certainly most interested in the peace, civilization, and prosperity of it.

Man is an imitative animal, the virtues as well as vices are contagious; withdraw these models and there is nothing left to influence by example, or deter by shame. It has been said, English property will be then induced to come and settle here and introduce manufactures; did it so? when provisions and labour were much cheaper than at

at present, and the country more tranquil. But it may be demanded, what proportionate return do we make England for all the advantages we derive from her assistance and protection. I say, in reply, we afforded protection to her, perhaps, *at the time*, with more friendship than policy. We lent her our troops, and paid them to carry on a war against a country, in which we were by no means concerned. We followed her fortune, without partaking in her deliberations, fought her battles without sharing the honours of her victories, or deriving any advantages from the splendour of her conquests.

I wish for the closest connection, strictest amity, most perfect community, and identity of interest, between the sister kingdoms. And with respect to *foreign powers* and *treaties*, they should always act as one State, but to sacrifice our domestic to an imperial Parliament, I will say, in the words of a great statesman. “ is neither the price I would give, nor think I would purchase.”

I think an Union would endanger the liberty of England as well as Ireland, if *united*.

united. Our Representatives would be a venal body, having disregarded the independence of their own Constitution, they would bestow little solicitude on the concerns of either, their own, or any other nation, and would, (to indemnify themselves for the expences which a London residence and neglect of private affairs would require) become the uniform appendage (as is the case of Scotland) of every Minister, and by such increase of influence destroy the equipoise of the Constitution, and probably make Ireland a complete Catholic country, losing the presence of her principal nobility and Protestant gentry, whose children would constantly receive English educations, and prejudices, which classes of inhabitants with the number of their relations and expectants whom they would attract, besides the phalanx which the vortex of a court always absorbs, would on the one hand, so much diminish the Protestant inhabitants, as to leave to the Catholic an uncontrouled and uncontroulable superiority. The circumstance of diversity of religious persuasions existing between sister countries must excite jealousies—much estrange and alienate their affections, instead of

of cementing, tend to their separation, and ultimately prove destructive to both. Bodies linked together by so unnatural a bond of Union as mutual distrust and hatred, must eventually be divorced, or exist together, to their mutual hatred and destruction.

Although the Author of the following pages must in common with every inhabitant of this metropolis lament the melancholy alteration this city must undergo from the removal of her Legislature; yet as a good citizen he would chearfully and speedily forget the humiliating circumstance, were he *fully ascertained* it must serve the *general* interest of the kingdom, (trusts however he has shewn the reverse, and that the principle itself is not receivable) he would divest himself of every partial consideration and local regard, which in such a case ought no more to be regarded, compared with the aggregated public *weal*, than the wafted dust in the balance, easily dissipated without weight, without consideration. However much every country must suffer from the *sudden* and *unexpected* alteration of the seat of Government, particularly to another country,

country, and it may fairly be compared to the heart in the human frame, which at once animates and vivifies the whole kingdom, circulates blood and vital warmth from centre to circumference, and is, in fact, the mirror in which the prosperity of the rest of the country is reflected with its departure, the fine arts, all the elegant and cultivated pursuits which adorn, improve and embellish life, fade and droop away.

Occidit, occidit, Spes omnis, et fortuna nostri nominis.

Some persons imagine, and argue, as if a consolidation of the Legislatures would correct the vices and cure the corruption of Parliament, and absolutely reason as if the purity of the Irish representatives would increase, when removed from their constituents, and as if crossing George's channel could wash away all political depravity, and even render the objects of their former condemnation (for surely many of the members of the present Parliament could be again chosen) men of pure and immaculate integrity, as if they considered the British Senate the chosen spot, the consecrated temple of genuine and unfulfilled freedom, and that of Ireland no better than the Augcan

stable, which no time or labour could cleanse of its filth and free from its impurities. But, my friends and countrymen, you have too much understanding to be deluded by such monstrous and absurd positions, which have such little foundation, either in fact or in a knowledge of human nature. You know the reverse too well. The British mace is equally liable as the Irish to be warped by the powerful and insinuating touch of corruption. Should the accusation be true, and well founded, surely commissioners appointed from so rank and vitiated a body, would be most unfit to transact such very momentous concerns, as negotiating for you. The argument would go against entertaining or receiving the principle of Union *at all*.

Supposing, for a moment, the principle of an incorporate Union admissible, surely poised as we are at present, between distraction and repose, we should not venture to agitate *this* or *any other* subject of political magnitude, and the public mind after the great exertion it has made, might reasonably expect some relaxation. How frantic and how culpable is it now deemed in England

land to encourage the discussion of any topic, which may in the remotest degree revive political controversy—how much more so in Ireland, when the Minister, in the speech from the Throne, at the commencement of the present session, has told you, the spirit of rebellion is only checked and crushed, but by no means extinguished, in Ireland. Follow then the wise example of your sister country, avoid all political discussions, *unless either obtruded on your consideration, or of such a momentous nature, as to involve in its consequences every thing dear to you and your posterity.*

Attollens humeri famamque fataque nepotum.

While I write, I tremble for the fate and character of my country. I hope to see it emerge from barbarity and obscurity, and *if independent*, trust it may at some future day, obtain *its merited rank and name* amongst the nations of the earth. Could I be the humble instrument of rousing my countrymen from their apathy, and raising in them a dignified and honourable pride, my utmost ambition would be gratified. You stand in a great and responsible situation—therefore let the Irish Harp assume a firm and manly tone. By a declaration of the general will *alone*, can the

baneful measure be counteracted, before it is *too late*. I shall, I hope, soon bring you to the test. However, before I conclude, I should wish to offer a few words of advice to a certain description of persons in this country, whose interposition may have considerable effect in preventing this blasted project from ever being brought forward: I allude to the borough holders of Ireland, whom I should beg leave to address, as a friend anxious for the protection of their property, and solicitous for the preservation of their fame, Should an Union be adopted, it is generally understood the counties alone will return representatives to the imperial Parliament. In which case, although possibly some sordid and paltry compensation may be intended, for the loss they will sustain, by the privation of Parliamentary property (for such I must call it in every sense of the word—nor need they blush for a possession which often preserved the House of Commons from the obloquy of being *in-dictum Parliamentum*) which perhaps might have, in course of revolving time, occasionally been affixed to it, had not an English borough returned to Parliament a CHATHAM, in the splendour of his glory, and an Irish one a GRATTAN in the meridian of his.

I say

I say then, as anxious for the protection of your property, what equivalent can you get for the weight and influence you now possess in the country, independent of the opportunities you have of promoting national advantage, your country's felicity; or even what compensation I ask you, could you obtain, commensurate to the heartfelt gratification you must experience in providing for some bosom friend; some dear dependant relation, who looks up to you as his friend and supporter, the source of his comfort, the very seat of his soul. Besides the pride you must feel in having a most manifest and decisive controul over mismanagement and misconduct. Since then, I say, Government can give no compensation for the sacrifice you must make of interest, character and fortune, see how the matter must stand. You are either paid for your boroughs, or you are not; if paid, the premium, I say, must be unequal to the value; besides bad, in another respect, operating as an unpopular act, imposing necessarily *new* burdens on the people, which you must eventually feel as injuring the value of property in general, and subjecting you to additional taxation, "So that it nought enriches you,

you, but makes them poor indeed." If you are not paid, you will be laughed at as credulous and clumsy fools selling your birth-right, without even a mess of pottage. And seriously do you imagine it within the sphere of your power, to make such a practical and *eternal* surrender, and that you can really reckon on those adherents whom you have introduced into Parliament as likely to support you in such a transfer of Legislative independence, however bound they may consider themselves to you on *every other occasion, and every other question*, by every tye of gratitude and obligation; (yet when the independence of their country is rudely assailed, and its very existence is at stake, and the unhappy alternative presents itself, whether they will make a sacrifice of *public* or *private* faith.) I am fully convinced, I say, (whenever such a question will arise) they must consider themselves much less culpable in breaking private friendship and violating social feeling, than in relinquishing *for ever*, the rights and liberties of their country; and although your adherents will undoubtedly feel themselves reduced to a most trying and mortifying dilemma, by the discussion of such a proposition, and will probably groan under the

the weight of obligation as Atlas did under that of the Heavens, (feeling their gratitude for former countenance and protection still entwined and interwoven with the very frame and texture of their heart) yet *ultimately* a consideration for public regard will be preferred, and the aggregated weal prevail over the dearest private affections.

How will borough-holders then appear? in what a contemptible light will they be shewn, deserted by their followers, and despised by administration with whom they will not be considered as having acted candidly or have kept their word and promise of support, bringing disappointment and defeat on them, discredit and disgrace on themselves.

But Government probably will tell you, an Union will heal your dissents, and put a period to your calamities. I say, surely it will not. Neither has Parliament caused the one, nor has the nature of our present connexion with Great Britain, excited the other. On the contrary, a domestic and internal Legislature, has prevented a fruitful and constant source of discontent that must have arisen

arisen, from the pressure of new taxes, and the latter removed a perpetual foundation of jealousy and division, by keeping us more cordially connected, than otherwise we would be, smarting and ulcerated under a sense of injured rights and violated freedom.

Rouse then, my friends and brother free-holders from your apathy and inaction, as you value your present reputation and future fame, use every *constitutional* exertion, with one voice declare and protest against a measure baneful in its principle, and destructive in its consequences. A general declaration of your will, will be the means of its prevention, will operate as an antidote that will meet this baneful poison in every limb and artery of the Constitution, conquer and expel the project *for ever.*

A FREEHOLDER.

F I N I S.

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